

Mr. Speaker, often we take to the floor to speak to the American public. Well, today I would like to speak to my colleagues in the House of Representatives and the men and women who are preparing their work for our floor action this week.

I would call to their attention that according to the Defense Department's own data, the program to clean up unexploded ordnance on formerly used defense sites will take as much as 252 years. That means in the year 2255 that Congress passing spending bills will still be appropriating money to deal with the problem that we could solve today.

Why, if we have technology that has already realized \$100 million saving at the former Lowry Bombing Range outside of Denver, Colorado, why are we not moving forward to address this problem?

Despite the fact that this Defense Science Board has proposed 5 recommendations that would allow us to address this problem, 80 percent of it over the next 5 years, why do we do nothing but continue to study it? Worse yet, we have actually decreased the funding that is crippling the Department of Defense. It is burdening other Federal land management agencies and it is endangering the health and safety of the American public.

We have to ask why.

Is it because we need another tragedy to occur like what happened in San Diego when 2 boys were killed when they discovered bombs in their neighborhood that, unknown to the residents, sat on top of a former bombing range? Is it because somehow we do not need 8 million acres of land that we could put in productive use in 5 years instead of 252 years? Is it because we believe somehow this contamination exists only in isolated places when, in fact, it is in every State in the Union and almost every Congressional district? Are we somehow unaware that when wildfires strike our public lands from New York to Colorado to Alaska that many of these lands are former ranges?

Three times since I have been in Congress we had to pull men and women out of the front lines fighting the fires because the extreme heat is exploding bombs around them.

Is it because we are unaware of the plight of a North Carolina couple with 5 children who are

risking bankruptcy because they moved out of their home when their young son found an old bomb in their front yard and they feared for the safety of their family? It is now a year-and-a-half later and they are still paying the mortgage on a home they cannot live in. They cannot sell it because the clean up has yet to begin because we underfund these programs.

Are we unaware that in the same area of North Carolina, the former Camp Butner, the Army Corps of Engineers has determined that they need to investigate another 20,000 acres for unexploded ordnance contamination? Yet, developers are buying up land and building homes before clean-up has even begun.

Can we in good conscience risk the health and safety of future residents? Is it because we do not know that other residential and business developments already exist or are being proposed in Texas, South Carolina, California, Colorado, here in Washington, D.C., and Massachusetts? Others will surely follow.

Is it because we are unaware that many of these unexploded bombs and discarded munitions are on tribal lands, thereby posing yet another hazard to the highly at-risk Native American population? Are we somehow unaware that the Federal land managers in the Bureau of Land Management, the Fish and Wildlife system, the National Forest Service, the National Park Service, where many of these former ranges are located, do not have the capacity needed to ensure the public safety?

Or is it despite the fact that the Department of Defense believes that ordnance and munitions on these formerly used sites poses enough of a national security risk to remove critical information about the sites from the public because they are afraid terrorists may find out, but we do not believe these same sites left untouched pose a risk to our citizens? Or is it simply that we hope that we can avert a tragedy in our lifetime and just pass this risk off to further future generations?

Whatever the reason, it is simply unacceptable. It is indeed unconscionable that we continue to turn a blind eye to a responsibility that we should be undertaking now.

After years of working on this issue and seeing Congress still missing in action, I will work this

week to make sure that my colleagues have a chance to be heard, to take action that might help protect people at risk in the future.